

RAPID APPEALS MODERNIZATION PROGRAM

Fact Sheet

Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) gives Veterans the opportunity for early participation in the new Supplemental Claim and Higher-Level Review lanes.

As a RAMP participant, you will benefit from:

- Early participation in the new, more efficient review process
- Potentially faster decisions and early resolution of disagreements
- Multiple review options
- The same potential effective date for your benefits regardless of the review option that you choose
- A new requirement that VA must have clear and convincing evidence to change any findings favorable to you in a VA decision

Which Appeals are Eligible for RAMP Processing?

Your appeal must be for a disability compensation-related claim, and pending in one of the following appeal stages at the time of election:

- Notice of Disagreement (NOD) has been filed
- Form 9, Appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board), has been filed
- Certified to Board (but not activated)
- On remand from the Board

* Compensation-related appeals certified to the Board and "activated" through formal placement on the Board's docket are excluded and will remain pending in the current appeals process. The Board will have notified you in writing if your appeal was formally placed on the docket. If you would like to see if your appeal meets the RAMP eligibility criteria listed above, you may check the status and stage of your appeal by visiting VA's vets.gov website at: <https://www.vets.gov/>

Which Review Lane is Right for You?

- **Supplemental Claim Lane**
 - Select this option if you have additional evidence that is *new and relevant* to support granting your benefit claim. VA's goal is to complete these supplemental claims in an average of 125 days.
 - VA will assist you in gathering new and relevant evidence to support your claim.
 - VA's review will include any new and relevant evidence submitted since we last decided your claim.
 - If necessary, you can continue to submit supplemental claims with new and relevant evidence or use the Higher-Level Review Lane after you receive a decision in the Supplemental Claim Lane by making an election for further review within one year of the date on your decision notice.
- **Higher-Level Review Lane**
 - Select this option if you have **no additional evidence** to submit in support of your claim but you believe that there was an error in the initial decision. VA's goal is to complete these higher-level reviews in an average of 125 days.
 - A higher-level review consists of an entirely new review of your claim by an experienced claim adjudicator.
 - Factual findings that are favorable to you cannot be changed unless there is evidence to the contrary that is clear and convincing.

VA Form 9.

- The Higher-Level Reviewer will only consider evidence that was in VA's possession at the time you opt-in. **You and/or your representative will NOT be able to add new evidence during this process. VA will stop developing for any pending evidence.**
- VA cannot assist you in developing additional evidence. However, if the Higher-Level Reviewer discovers an error in VA's duty to assist in the prior decision your claim will return to initial decision makers for correction of the error.
- You or your representative can request an optional **one time telephonic** informal conference with the Higher-Level Reviewer to identify specific errors in the case. Requesting an informal conference may cause some delay in the processing of your higher-level review.
- If necessary, you can use the Supplemental Claim Lane after you receive a decision in the Higher-Level Review Lane, by making an election for further review within one year of the date on your decision notice.

What It Means to Opt-In

There are two different review lanes under RAMP as noted above. If you choose to opt-in to one of the new review lanes, we will no longer process your compensation appeal in the current process. Designated claims adjudicators at a local VA office will conduct a new review and provide you with a decision. For the issues addressed under RAMP, you will not be able to request additional review of VA's decision under the current (legacy) appeals process; however, you will have access to all the review options and benefits of the new process.

Choosing one review option now does not prevent you from submitting another supplemental claim or choosing another review option after receiving an initial decision in RAMP. In addition, you will have the ability to appeal to the Board if you determine that further review of VA's decision is necessary. However, the Board will not process your appeal under the new streamlined process until no earlier than October 2018.

When appealing to the Board, you may submit additional evidence and/or request a hearing before a Veterans Law Judge (VLJ). You may also choose for the Board to review your claim without any additional evidence or a hearing, which will likely lead to a faster decision. By selecting one of these options, the Board will place your appeal onto a list for consideration in the order it was received, depending on the hearing and evidence submission elections you make.

What It Means to Stay in the Current Appeals Process

If you choose not to participate in RAMP, **you do not need to respond to this letter.** Your appeal(s) will remain in the current appeals process. If you wish to withdraw any or all of your current claims on appeal, please consult your representative (if you have one) for assistance or contact us in writing.

You may experience long processing delays if you decide to remain in the current appeals process. Although each individual case is different, in 2016, Veterans in the current process waited an average of 3 years for resolution of their appeals, and those that received a decision from the Board waited an average of 7 years from the date that they filed their NOD.

How You Can Opt-In

You can choose to have your compensation claim placed into one of the new review lanes by selecting one of the options on the attached RAMP Opt-in Election document, dating and signing where indicated, and then returning it to us along with the attached cover sheet on top. If you do not want your claim to stay in the current appeals process and wish to participate in RAMP, please respond within 60 days from the date of this letter. Send the RAMP Opt-in Election document along with the cover sheet to the address listed on the document.

